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Still Going After the CIA

Trying to repeal the 1980 election and preserve Jimmy Carter's human rights policies, liberal Democratic congressmen are plotting to keep control of the House Foreign Affairs African subcommittee and retain as a symbol of the past a staffer named Steven R. Weissman.

Weissman's 1978 attack on CIA undercover work in Zaire was reprinted in the book "Dirty Work 2, the CIA in Africa." It was published in 1979 with an introduction by Philip Agee, the renegade ex-CIA official now living in exile in West Germany to avoid U.S. investigators.

Weissman was hired two years ago by Rep. Stephen J. Solarz of New York, who is about to step down as chairman of the African subcommittee. Solarz then did not know Weissman had contributed to "Dirty Work 2," described in an introduction by Agee as an attempt "to expose and analyze clandestine operations" by the CIA in Africa. Weissman told us he himself was unaware that "Dirty Work 2" would include an introduction by Agee and an appendix listing the names of 385 undercover CIA operatives in Africa.

Solarz is giving up his African affairs chairmanship for what he thinks will be the more lively Asian affairs panel. The power play of liberals versus moderates in the committee's Democratic ranks revolves around Solarz's push for Rep. Howard Wolpe of Michigan, a liberal scholar on African affairs who is backed by the Congressional Black Caucus. Wolpe has given Solarz assurances that if he gets the chairmanship, he will retain the subcommittee's present staff—including Steve Weissman.

Wolpe's opponent in the caucus of committee Democrats, set for tomorrow, is moderate Rep. Dan Mica of Florida, who has seniority to become chairman but is regarded as dangerously unsafe on the human rights issue by the liberals. Supporting Solarz and Wolpe is the committee's longtime liberal powerhouse, Rep. Jonathan Bingham of New York, backed by many junior members (including five freshmen, two of them black and all of them liberals).

"These people are terrified," a committee staffer told us. "They think [President] Reagan and [Secretary of State Alexander] Haig are out of touch with reality, and they are trying to build a barricade around the African subcommittee to keep it safe for human rights."

In fact, it is Solarz, Bingham and Wolpe who seem "out of touch with reality." Their insistence on keeping Weissman as the Africa subcommittee's No. 2 staffer shows a quixotic attempt to repeal the election and restore politics of the '60s and '70s. The role of Weissman, so distrusted by the government of Zaire that he is regarded as an enemy by that U.S. ally, shines as a *beau ideal* of the post-Vietnam mood. But that time has passed.

How far it has passed was demonstrated last summer when Weissman appeared at a CIA briefing for Solarz in the congressman's office. Hours after the briefing, Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA, telephoned Solarz and admonished that the presence of Weissman had tended to tighten the tongues of the CIA briefers.

Solarz then learned for the first time from Turner that Weissman's treatise, titled "The CIA and U.S. Policy in Zaire and Angola," had been reprinted in "Dirty Work." Asking an explanation from his staffer, Solarz was told Weissman did not know that Agee and other anti-CIA extremists also would appear between the covers. Solarz transmitted that explanation to Turner and the matter was dropped, with Weissman retaining his CIA security clearances.

But Weissman's activities on behalf of the African subcommittee, which the panel's liberals are battling to continue, do not stop with "Dirty Work." In informal remarks to the African Studies Association in Philadelphia last Oct. 16, Weissman used his subcommittee position to attack Zaire in a way surpassing the latitude taken by members of Congress themselves.

"Zaire is a basket case," Weissman told his largely black audience. "It is falling apart. . . . A concentrated lobbying effort is what is needed in Washington to change policy." Weissman, who has no notes, told us he never said that. But an eyewitness, who took careful notes, attests to the accuracy of the quote.

Those and other Weissman comments look to the government of Zaire suspiciously like an attempt by a U.S. government official to destabilize their country. In fact, the prospect of change in U.S. policy toward Zaire desired by Weissman is zero under Reagan and Haig; any change will go the other way—firming up U.S. support for the Mobutu regime, corrupt or not, with less minute attention to human rights. Backroom infighting over Solarz's successor reached a frenzied peak over the weekend with Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill himself helping Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Clement Zablocki assert the rule of orderly succession, supporting Mica over Wolpe. That is one way to operate.

The other is to read the Nov. 4 election returns to the Democratic caucus. If the African affairs subcommittee truly desires to exercise influence, it must understand that the heady years of the anti-CIA cult and human rights as the shining emblem of American policy are gone.

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